

Annex b) (i) - Drone Unit Update report

To provide an update on the progress and activity of the Alliance Drone Team during its first year of operation.

Background

Dorset Police began trialling the use of drones for operational policing purposes in November 2015, as part of the Alliance programme. The six month trial demonstrated the benefits of drone deployment for capturing still or video images on difficult terrain and hard to reach areas – an especially useful tool when used, for example, in support of missing person searches, combatting wildlife crime and even supporting firearms incidents. The use of drones became regularised throughout 2016, resulting in the Alliance launching the country's first dedicated drone unit in the summer of 2017.

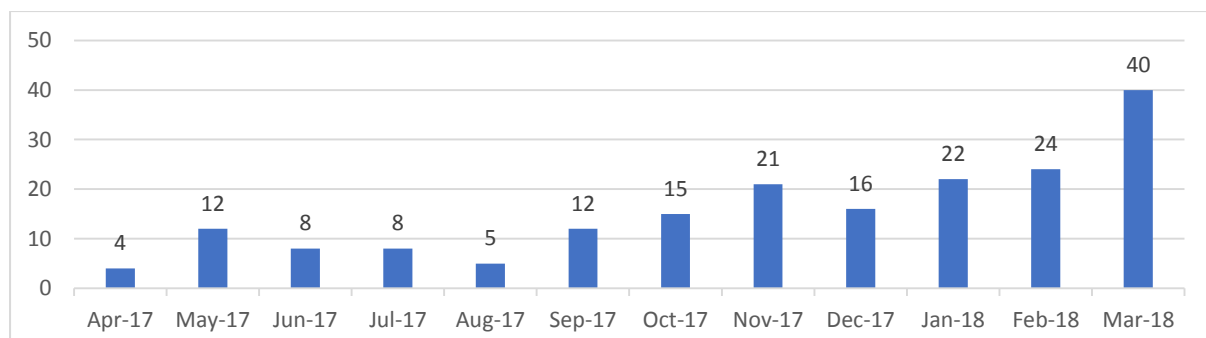
The Alliance Drone Team (ADT) continue to be one of the leading Drone Teams in UK Policing and consists of a manager and two constables operating across the three counties. Over the last year they assisted with training to 36 officers from the Firearms, Roads Policing and Enhanced Policing Teams who are now accredited drone pilots, with further increases anticipated within the next few months.

The National Police Chiefs Council lead for drones is Sussex Chief Constable, Giles York, and there is also an NPCC lead for Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and the criminal use of drones based in Merseyside. The ADT manager is currently the South West regional lead and chairs meetings every three months as well as attending the NPCC regional chairs meeting to provide an update from the region. He also sits on a national drone training forum. The unit manager meets regularly with the Commercial Aviation Safety Team looking at the development of a specific Police drone, as well as the training portfolio working closely with the Civil Aviation Authority on developing an emergency services operations manual.

Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police are widely regarded as leaders of the police use of drones nationally and have had calls and visits from across the country as well as enquiries from Sweden, Holland, Germany, Falkland Islands, Slovenia, Italy and France. The unit manager has given various presentations to other forces, industry and even the Dubai Police.

Deployment and Financial Benefits

There were a total of 187 deployments for the ADT in 2017-2018, as follows:



In order to try and reduce the costs of the National Police Aviation Service (NPAS) for the Alliance, all requests for air support in non-urgent cases are first reviewed by the ADT. In addition to some of the examples already highlighted, the Unit have been able to assist operational colleagues in areas such as road traffic collision response, crime scene photography and the policing of football matches and major events locally.

It is fully acknowledged that drones will not replace the requirement for NPAS aerial assets. Drones are being deployed in support of NPAS, when NPAS is not available or where tasks are more suited for a smaller aerial platform. The drones are relatively covert and have been deployed in support of surveillance and intelligence gathering. Work is ongoing to further develop the role of drones in operational policing, missing person searches and the deployment of new technology to map fatal road traffic collision scenes using 3D digital scanners.

By taking on many secondary, non-urgent tasking requests it is anticipated that the ADT can realise savings from the NPAS budget of an average of £30,000 per month. This could potentially result in annual savings in the region of £340,000 - £360,000.

Under the NPAS funding model each force pays an upfront cost plus a pay-per-use fee. For 2017/18 this was roughly £1300 per deployment of the aircraft. Had all of the drone tasks identified above been requested from NPAS instead this would have seen an increase of £280,000 in NPAS costs. Factoring in ADT staff costs of approximately £140,000 and initial unit set up costs so far of £75,700, the unit has effectively saved the alliance £64,300 in 2017/18 in real terms. This saving figure is expected to increase significantly in the coming year as the drones take on more and more traditional NPAS tasks and less money is spent on equipment and training.

Other benefits such as court presentation work and reconstructions cannot be given a monetary value, but comments from prosecutions barristers of the excellent footage are invaluable.

Education

The Drone Team have developed a Safer Drone education programme for those members of the public who fly their own drones. The Safer Drones workshop has been very successful at a local level with approximately 400 people trained in six months, also raising £4,000 in the process. The workshops are endorsed by the Civil Aviation Authority, National Air Traffic Service, and the Association of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems.

There may also be the potential to use the workshops as a diversion to prosecution course (similar to existing speed and driver awareness courses) when the new drone bill is introduced. Other forces have already made contact to enquire about the operation of the workshops with a view to implementing them in their own areas.

Forward Look

A new drone bill is currently going through parliament and should come into force later this year. The offences will be contrary to the Air Navigation Order which are

not well known. The drone unit will lead on training and advice to officers which will primarily involve developing a training package/flow chart for advice to officers

The ADT unit has started delivering a drone awareness course to initial CID course attendees, Firearms Commanders, Public Order Commanders, Force Incident Managers, the High Tech Crime Unit, and Resource Management staff. As the use of drones increases there will be a need for more development and training. There will also need to be more forward thinking in looking at ways that drones can impact further on Police work to save money and increase efficiencies.

Examples of work undertaken by the ADT between April – July 2017

- 15 public engagement days which includes four 50th Anniversary events, both County shows, Blue light days, Ocean Festival.
- Numerous training days with ARV, Cliff Rescue, NPAS, Coastguard and EOD.
- Developed a downlink solution for communications with operational commanders which is in its final stages of testing.
- Carried out two Cricket Stadium surveys for A&S police for a major event as NPAS not available.
- Only force to be accredited by the Surveillance Commissionaire for our policies on privacy and our privacy impact assessment.
- Working with Football unit re use of drones for the football season.
- Dealt with 12 reports of drone misuse by the public and issued three warning notices.
- Working with Operation Cobb (badger cull)
- Working with Contingency Planning and Force search lead to create a new policy regarding using drones in missing person searches.
- Working on External media strategy. Overseeing two interviews with press office for BBC and Disney production re a police drone documentary series.
- Working with neighbourhood policing to experiment using drone for Night time Economy in Newquay.